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ABSTRACT

This booklet is one of a series developed by the Northern Colorado Educational Board of Cooperative Services to make available to teachers ideas designed and tested by other teachers. Many of the ideas are from educational journals as well as from the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC). The booklet contains sixteen activities involving creative writing, directly or indirectly, and the purposes of each of these are explained. Some of the objectives of the activities are: to use all the senses in making observations, to encourage verbal expression, to become aware of the five senses and of the words that effectively describe them, to become aware of details necessary for effective description, to observe and describe accurately, to observe and draw a picture using words, to make inferences, and to write simple rhymes. (TS)

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CREATIVE WRITING:

Activity Ideas for Observation and Description Grades 3 and 4

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For
Northern Colorado Educational Board of Cooperative Services

Dr. Walter G. Turner
Executive Director

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TO THE TEACHER:

It's not easy to be a teacher, to make each day alive and stimulating. We at NCEBOCS want to make your job a little easier. We've talked with teachers and learned that you especially need good ideas for activities, activities that students will enjoy while they learn the skills they need.

Creative Writing: Activity Ideas for Observation and Description, Grades 3 and 4 is one of a series of booklets developed by NCEBOCS to make available to teachers ideas designed and tested by other teachers. We gather these ideas from educational journals as well as from the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), a nation-wide system of educational information supported by the National Institute of Education (NIE).

The purpose of this idea book is to present you with suggestions for activities dealing with one facet of creative writing. We hope you will modify some, create extensions for others, and jot down your own. As this booklet changes and grows, so will its utility and effectiveness for you.

PURPOSE: To use all the senses in making observations.

ACTIVITY: Tell your students that today they are to try to discover as many things as possible about popcorn by using all five of their senses. Point out that often when we describe things we are limited to telling how it looks, because we aren't able to use the other senses in our observations. (It may be too far away or be displayed under glass; it may not make a sound; or it may be poisonous; and so on.) Looking is only one of the five senses, and whenever we can safely use other senses in observing something, we will be able to give a far more complete description of it.

Have two or three people come to the front of the room and ask them to observe popcorn before it is popped. If they only look at it, ask the rest of the class to suggest other ways they can find out what unpopped corn is really like (tasting, feeling, biting on kernels, smelling, listening). Write their observations on the board.

Pop the corn, asking students to quietly observe with all their senses. When the popcorn is finished, pass it around so that everyone has some. As the popcorn is passed, urge students to think of ways to observe it other than by taste. Make a new column of their observations on the board.

Give students time to thoughtfully examine the popcorn and take turns giving their observations. (You may want to have another popperful going while they are doing this, both to keep the aroma before them and to replenish their dwindling supply.)

Plan and make a bulletin board to graphically display students' sensory observations. Divide the bulletin board space into a section for observations about unpopped corn and a section for observations about popped corn. Have part of the class cut pieces of light brown paper into the shape of unpopped kernels and write an observation from the list on the board on each "kernel." Pin these in a mound shape in the section of the bulletin board designated for observations about unpopped corn. Have the rest of the class cut white paper into shapes of popped corn, write observations on them, and pin them to the other section of the bulletin board in such a way as to suggest the motion of popping corn. Decide on a suitable caption for the project and let a small committee prepare the lettering.

PURPOSE: To encourage expression

ACTIVITY: Bring an interesting picture to class and have students react to it. Then ask each student to write a word, a phrase, or a sentence or two which can be mounted on strips beside the picture. Each child can read his own contribution.

PURPOSE: To become aware of the sense of touch and of words that effectively describe it.

ACTIVITY: Select five articles having a variety of interesting textures and shapes (marble, velvet, bark, cotton, etc.). Put each of the five articles in a bag or box and write a number on the outside of the container. Place the containers around the room.

Tell students to examine the contents of each container using only their sense of touch. Tell them to close their eyes and imagine they are a blind person trying to "see" the object with their fingers. Ask them to then write words or phrases describing the textures and shapes they feel. Stress that they are to try to choose words that will create a vivid picture in someone else's mind.

Bring all students and descriptions together and collectively write a description for each of the objects. Discuss the importance of using vivid words.

PURPOSE: To become aware of the sense of touch and of techniques for effectively describing it.

ACTIVITY: Ask students to form groups of six to eight. Have the groups six in a circle.

Tell students that you are going to give each group an ice cube. They are to pass it around the circle to the right. As each person gets the ice cube, he is to examine it and tell something he observed. Urge students to use all their senses as they think about the ice cube. No one may repeat an observation given by someone else in his circle.

Pass out the cubes and let students begin stating their observations. (Examples: Ice is cold; Ice cubes are slippery; etc.).

After a few minutes, when everyone has had at least one turn, change the activity to making comparisons. Tell the students that this time they are to think of something to which they can compare the ice cube. Again, remind them to use their senses and to tell what the ice cube feels like, looks like, and so on. (It might be a good idea to pass out new ice cubes at this point.)

After a few minutes, when everyone has had a turn in making comparisons, again change the focus of the activity. Now ask students to tell how the ice cube affects them or how it makes them feel.

Then gather up the ice cubes and ask students to write down some of their thoughts and ideas about ice. Let them choose the form for expressing themselves. Some may write a series of sentences in list order, some may develop a paragraph and some may feel in the mood to write a poem.

PURPOSE: To become aware of the sense of taste and of the words that effectively describe it.

ACTIVITY: Give each student a piece of celery. Tell them to eat it slowly and to think about how it tastes and feels in their mouths. Ask the students to give words and phrases which describe the way it tastes and feels. Write their descriptions on the board. Help them think of things to say by asking such questions as:

What happened when you bit into the celery?
How did the celery feel inside your mouth?
What flavor was it?
Did the celery change as you chewed it? How?

Next, give each child a chocolate kiss. After they have eaten it, elicit words and phrases to describe its flavor and texture. Write their ideas in a second list on the board.

Then ask students to compare the two foods:

In what ways are they alike?
In what ways are they different?

Have students write a paragraph telling which they enjoyed eating more, the celery or the chocolate kiss. Stress the need to write vivid descriptions to explain their choice. Tell them to try to make the reader feel the celery or chocolate in his own mouth.

PURPOSE: To become aware of the sense of taste and of the words that effectively describe it.

ACTIVITY: Ask the students to think of different flavors of ice cream and sherbets they have eaten. List the different kinds on the board. Ask students to think of possible new flavors, writing their suggestions in a second list.

Divide the class into groups of three and have them write an advertisement for the new flavor. Suggest that they use highly descriptive words that will appeal to people's sense of taste and sight, creating a desire for the new product.

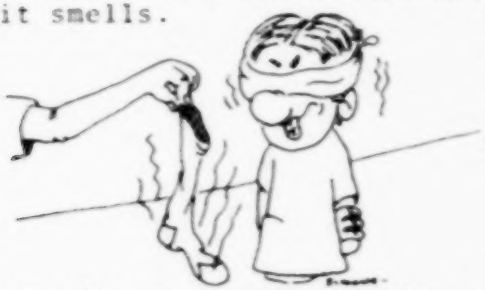
Note: Some students might want to try alliteration in their descriptions: Crazy cranberry, goofy grape.

Students may want to illustrate their advertisements and compile them in a little booklet.

PURPOSE: To become aware of the sense of smell and of words that effectively describe smells.

ACTIVITY: Tell students that they are going to play a "smelling game." Blindfold a student and pass something under his nose. Ask him to describe it, tell what it reminds him of and then try to guess what it is. Repeat this with several students. Write each object and the descriptive words on the board.

Then ask students to become smell detectives by finding objects that can be identified by smell alone. Ask them to choose one of these items and write a short description of the way it smells.



PURPOSE: To describe emotional reaction to music.

ACTIVITY: Play soft, gay, sad and/or marching music and ask students to briefly express their reactions to each. To stimulate students, you may want to ask the following questions:

1. How does the music make you feel?
2. Does is bring any past experiences to mind?
3. Does it make you feel like doing anything in particular?

PURPOSE: To become aware of details necessary for effective description.

ACTIVITY: Pass out small pieces of paper. Have students write their name in the corner of the paper and then discuss the shape of the paper. Ask them to name as many other shapes as they can and think of familiar examples of each. Ask students to choose one of the shapes and write it down on their paper. Then ask them to choose a color they think is interesting and write it. Finally, ask them to choose a number between one and one hundred and write it down.

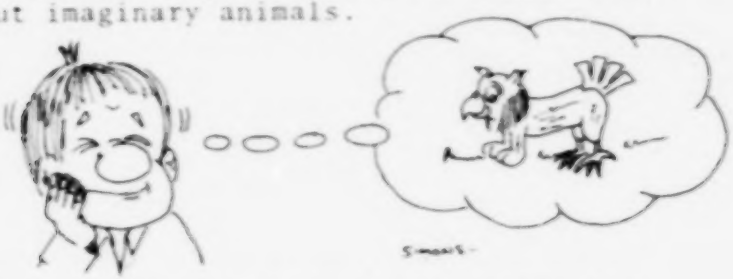
After students have written the three things, have them try to imagine an animal in that shape, with that color fur or skin, and with that many legs. Have them close their eyes and try to get a mental image of such an animal.

Pass out drawing paper and let students make a drawing of their strange new creature. Suggest they start by making the shape they chose in the color they chose and then add other details. While they work, ask them to think of a name for their animal.

Then ask students to imagine where and how the animal lives. Have them consider the following questions:

> Does your animal make any sounds? If so, what kind?
> Where does it live?
> How does it move? Does it move fast or slow?
> What does it eat? How does it get its food?
> Who are its enemies? How does it protect itself?
> What kind of personality does it have? Is it quiet and peaceful, or noisy and fierce?

Then ask them to write a paragraph about their animal. Attach the illustrations of the animals to the descriptions of each. Put all of these together into the class book about imaginary animals.



PURPOSE: To become aware of details necessary for effective description.

ACTIVITY: Ask students to write a short paragraph describing a person or animal. Trade papers with a classmate and ask him or her to draw a picture to fit the description. Give the picture to the person who wrote the description. Let him decide if he should describe his character in more detail.

PURPOSE: To observe and describe accurately

MATERIALS NEEDED: Thread cut into 1-3 inch pieces or pieces of paper
One inflated balloon
A small portion of dry wool or a piece of woolen cloth
About a teaspoonful of puffed wheat (optional)

ACTIVITY: Ask the students to observe closely. Rub the inflated balloon briskly with the wool to charge it. Then hold the balloon over the pieces of thread (or paper or particles of puffed wheat) and watch them perform.

Ask each student to write a short description of what they observed. Compare descriptions. If students perceptions of the experiment are different, discuss why this is so.

A NOTE ON SOURCES:

The journal articles listed below were the most valuable of all that we examined. In addition, we would strongly recommend that teachers interested in composition obtain a micro-fiche copy of ED075853 from the ERIC system. ED075853 refers to a document entitled Composition C - D (Grades 3 and 4); Teachers Guide. The materials in this guide were developed through the Oregon Elementary English Project at Oregon University in Eugene. The guide contains practical, easy to use suggestions for teaching composition and was our most valuable source in the development of this idea book.

Chase, Naomi C. "Children's Writing: The Product," Elementary English, Vol. 50 (September, 1973), 977-981.

"Creative Writing," Instructor, Vol. 83 (October, 1973), 104+.

DeHaven, Edna. "A Questioning Strategy Model for Creative Writing," Elementary English, Vol. 50 (September, 1973), 959-961+.

Furner, Beatrice A. "Creative Writing through Creative Dramatics," Elementary English, Vol. 50 (March, 1973), 405-408+.

Girod, Gerald R. "Creative Writing and Behavioral Objectives," Elementary English, Vol. 50 (September, 1973), 971-976.

Murray, Donald M. "Why Creative Writing Isn't---Or Is," Elementary English, Vol. 50, (April, 1973), 523-525+.

Steiner, Robert. "Teaching Writing to Children," Elementary English, Vol. 50 (September, 1973), 964-966+.

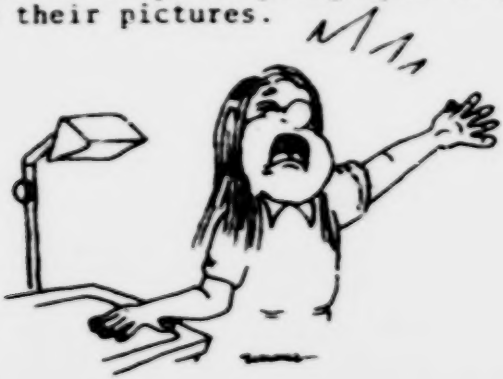
PURPOSE: To observe and draw a picture using words.

ACTIVITY: Choose a day when there is a great deal of contrast between clouds and sky and when winds aloft are moving and changing the formations.

Take your students outside and let them sit or lie down to watch the movements of the clouds. Guide their observation with suggestions to look for variety in color, formations which look like people or animals, and any other interesting shapes. Be sure the students have ample time to watch the clouds, to see them move and change. (You may want to return to the classroom at this point to complete the lesson.)

Ask students to write a description of the clouds. Some may want to write poetry. If so, emphasize word choice rather than form; poetry does not have to follow a set meter or rhyme pattern. Stress the fact that they are trying to draw a picture using words.

Let students paint a water-color picture of the cloud scene they have described. Then using the opaque projector, let volunteers read their descriptive paragraphs or poems and show their pictures.



PURPOSE: To observe and make inferences.

ACTIVITY: Bring to class an old hat (any kind: dress, engineer, police, straw, etc.). Hold up the hat and let students observe it. You may want to pass it around for closer observation. Discuss what kind of hat it is, who might wear a hat like this, and how it is different from its new condition. Write on the board the words or phrases the students use in describing the old hat.

Continue the discussion with such questions as:

Where do you think this old hat has been?
What kinds of experiences do you think this old hat has had?
What might have caused this hole (or spot or other sign of wear)?
What experience of the old hat do you think was most exciting? Most enjoyable?

Ask students to pretend the old hat is telling them episodes from its life. Have them listen carefully to their imaginations for the interesting things it has experienced or places it has been.

Allow a few moments for thinking and then let volunteers tell stories of the old hat's life. If many students volunteer, you may want to limit each story to one adventure or episode. Then ask students to write their stories.

PURPOSE: To become aware of action words.
To develop a sensitivity to rhythm in poetry.

ACTIVITY: Clear a space in your classroom, get out a jump rope and give several children a turn at jumping rhymes. Have them "sing along" while another student is jumping.

Tell the class that many athletes use rope jumping as one of their training activities. Have them imagine that they are a boxer, baseball player or a gymnast and write a short rhyme that one of these people would use.

Note: It might be helpful to have the class brainstorm to identify action words that might be used. For example, a baseball player might make up a chant of action words heard at a baseball game; a horse-back rider might make up a story about a ride that started out with a slow walking rhythm and increased in tempo to a fast running rhythm.

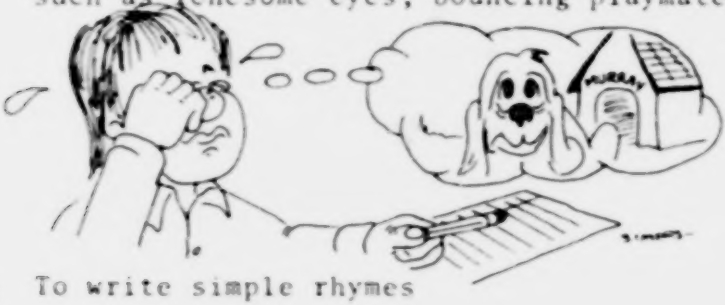
Examples of familiar rope-jumping rhymes:

Spanish dancer do the splits
Spanish dancer do the kick
Spanish dancer turn around
Spanish dancer touch the ground
Spanish dancer get out of town.

Teddy bear, teddy bear turn around
Teddy bear, teddy bear touch the ground
Teddy bear, teddy bear show your shoe
Teddy bear, teddy bear that will do
Teddy bear, teddy bear go upstairs
Teddy bear, teddy bear say your prayers
Teddy bear, teddy bear switch off the light
Teddy bear, teddy bear say Goodnight.

PURPOSE: To provide practice in writing descriptive phrases.

ACTIVITY: Ask students to describe a pet; what he looks like, what they think he feels, and what they think he likes to do. Then ask them to try to describe him using only two word phrases such as lonesome eyes, bouncing playmate, etc.



PURPOSE: To write simple rhymes

ACTIVITY: Tell students that they are going to play a riddle-and-rhyme game today. Explain that they will write rhymed riddles and then try to guess each other's riddles.

First, do a rhymed riddle together as a class. Choose an object in the room, such as the clock. Ask students to think of ways to describe the clock--its size, shape, color and use. Suggest that comparing it to other things is one way of describing. Write their ideas on the board.

From these ideas, try to make a rhymed riddle about the clock. Caution students to include clues without giving it away. For example, you might come up with something like:

One-eyed classes
Cover its face;
Round it goes
But keeps in place.

Then ask each student to choose an object (you may wish to limit objects to those in the room). Have each student make a descriptive list of their object's size, shape, color, use, and things to which it might be compared. Then have them try to make a rhymed riddle from their list of ideas. Keep the form flexible--let them use any rhyme scheme they wish and suggest that they might add other interesting comparisons.

Give encouragement and help to students who have difficulty writing a riddle. If necessary, gather together a group of non-productive students and write a riddle together so they too will have something to share.